

11-17-1993

TV Families Stable, Happy Over the Last 40 Years

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls

Recommended Citation

"TV Families Stable, Happy Over the Last 40 Years" (1993). *News Releases*. 8090.
https://ecommons.udayton.edu/news_rls/8090

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Marketing and Communications at eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in News Releases by an authorized administrator of eCommons. For more information, please contact frice1@udayton.edu, mschlangen1@udayton.edu.



The University of Dayton

News Release

Nov. 17, 1993

Contact: Pam Huber

TV FAMILIES STABLE, HAPPY OVER THE LAST 40 YEARS

DAYTON, Ohio — Despite Dan Quayle's predictions, the nuclear family hasn't lost the television battle to single motherhood. In fact, the popularity champ of family models on TV is the extended family where Aunt Bea or Uncle Jesse move in and become an indispensable part of the family.

Extended families have reigned on TV since the 1960s and nuclear families run a close second, say two University of Dayton researchers. "Families on Television: A Four-Decade Analysis 1950-1989" will be presented Nov. 20 at the Speech Communication Association annual convention in Miami by Thomas Skill and James D. Robinson, associate professors of communication at UD.

Of the five longest-running programs featuring families, three are extended and two are nuclear families. "Ozzie and Harriet" leads, followed by "Bonanza," "My Three Sons," "Happy Days" and "All in the Family." The Nelsons and the Cunninghams represent nuclear families while the Cartwrights, the Douglasses and the Bunkers are all extended families.

"Real-life families rarely take their cues from TV, although they may admire the "mythological, romanticized" life of living with grandma and grandpa on Walton's Mountain, Skill says. "But we don't find life imitating art. People are not picking up grandma at the nursing home and bringing her home to live," he says.

The study offers a clear picture of how television has never reflected real family life. In the 1950s, 17 percent of all TV families were headed by a single father, while the 1960

-over-

OFFICE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

300 College Park Dayton, Ohio 45469-1679 (513) 229-3241 FAX: (513) 229-3063

census reveals little more than 1 percent of real-life families depended on a single dad.

Divorced, separated and unmarried parents were invisible on TV in the 1960s, even though 67 percent of all single parents fell into those categories in real life, according to the 1970 census.

Black families finally made a dent on television in the 1970s, increasing from the 1 percent of all TV families represented by "Julia" in 1968 to close to 17 percent in the 1970s. Shows such as "The Jeffersons," "Sanford and Son," "What's Happening" and "Good Times" drove the numbers higher in the 1970s.

A feature of the '80s on TV was the recognition accorded single mothers ("Who's the Boss," "Mama's Family" and "Kate & Allie") and shows classified by the researchers as multiple portrayals because the family situations were too convoluted to fit one category. "Dallas" and "Dynasty" are examples.

The emergence of yuppies in the '80s — young, urban professionals with double incomes and no kids — failed to influence the portrayal of families on television. "Married couples without kids accounted for about 25 percent of TV families in the 1950s, and there's been a steady decrease since then," Robinson says, noting that the share fell to 17 percent in the 1980s. "It's possible that those who are uninvolved in having families in real life are interested in watching shows with families as a vicarious experience or for the novelty."

TV families all have one thing in common, Skill says. They're happy. "Once TV puts them into a configuration, whether it's nuclear, single-parent or extended, that family is looked upon as relatively satisfying," he says. "Maybe with the exception of 'Married ... with Children.' But even they don't break up; they're still a family."

-30-

NOTE TO EDITORS: Call Tom Skill and Danny Robinson at the Fountainebleau Hilton Resort and Spa in Miami at (305) 538-2000 through Nov. 21. Skill's office number at UD is (513) 229-2028 and Robinson's is (513) 229-2340.